THE VEIL

by

WALTER DE LA MARE

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THE VEIL

and other

POEMS

By

WALTER DE LA MARE

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NOTE

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20615

CONTENTS

	PAGE
The Imp Within	3
The Old Angler	5
The Willow	10
Titmouse	11
The Veil	12
The Fairy in Winter	13
The Flower	14
Before Dawn	15
The Spectre	17
The Voice	18
The Hour-glass	19
In the Dock	20
The Wreck	21
The Suicide	22
Drugged	23
Who's That?	25
Hospital	26
A Sign	28
Good-bye	30
The Monologue	31
Awake!	34
Forgiveness	35
The Moth	36
Not That Way	37

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Crazed	39
Fog	40
SOTTO VOCE	42
The Imagination's Pride	44
The Wanderers	46
The Corner Stone	48
The Spirit of Air	50
The Unfinished Dream	51
Music	54
Tidings	56
The Son of Melancholy	57
The Quiet Enemy	60
The Familiar	61
Maerchen	63
Gold	64
Mirage	65
Flotsam	67
Mourn'st Thou Now?	68
The Galliass	69
The Decoy	70
Sunk Lyonesse	71
The Catechism	72
Futility	73
Bitter Waters	74
Who?	76
A Riddle	77
The Owl	79
The Last Coachload	80
An Epitaph	84

THE VEIL AND OTHER POEMS

THE IMP WITHIN

'ROUSE now, my dullard, and thy wits awake;
'Tis first of the morning. And I bid thee make—
No, not a vow; we have munched our fill of these
From crock of bone-dry crusts and mouse-gnawn
cheese—
Nay, just one whisper in that long, long ear—
Awake; rejoice. Another Day is here:—

'A virgin wilderness, which, hour by hour,
Mere happy idleness shall bring to flower.
Barren and arid though its sands now seem,
Wherein oasis becks not, shines no stream,
Yet wake—and lo, 'tis lovelier than a dream.

'Plunge on, thy every footprint shall make fair
Its thirsty waste; and thy foregone despair
Undarken into sweet birds in the air,
Whose coursing wings and love-crazed summoning
cries
Into infinity shall attract thine eyes.

'No . . . ? Well, lest promise in performance
faint,
A less inviting prospect will I paint.
I bid thee adjure thy Yesterday, and say:
"As *thou* wast, Enemy, so be To-day.—
Immure me in the same close narrow room;
Be hated toil the lamp to light its gloom;
Make stubborn my pen; sift dust into my ink;
Forbid mine eyes to see, my brain to think.
Scare off the words whereon the mind is set.
Make memory the power to forget.
Constrain imagination; bind its wing;
Forbid the unseen Enchantresses to sing.
Ay, do thy worst!"

'Vexed Spectre, prythee smile.
Even though that yesterday was bleak and sour,
Art thou a slave beneath its thong to cower?
Thou hast survived. And hither am I—again,
Kindling with mockery thy o'erlaboured brain.
Though scant the moments be wherein we meet,
Think, what dark months would even one make
sweet.

'Thy quill? Thy paper? Ah, my dear, be true.
Come quick To-morrow. Until then, Adieu.'

THE OLD ANGLER

TWILIGHT leaned mirrored in a pool
  Where willow boughs swept green and hoar,
Silk-clear the water, calm and cool,
  Silent the weedy shore:

There in abstracted, brooding mood
  One fishing sate. His painted float
Motionless as a planet stood;
  Motionless his boat.

A melancholy soul was this,
  With lantern jaw, gnarled hand, vague eye;
Huddled in pensive solitariness
  He had fished existence by.

Empty his creel; stolen his bait—
  Impassively he angled on,
Though mist now showed the evening late
  And daylight well-nigh gone.

Suddenly, like a tongueless bell,
  Downward his gaudy cork did glide;
A deep, low-gathering, gentle swell
  Spread slowly far and wide.

Wheeped out his tackle from noiseless winch,
And furtive as a thief, his thumb,
With nerve intense, wound inch by inch
A line no longer numb.

What fabulous spoil could thus unplayed
Gape upward to a mortal air?—
He stoops engrossed; his tanned cheek greyed;
His heart stood still: for there,

Wondrously fairing, beneath the skin
Of secretly bubbling water seen,
Swims—not the silver of scale and fin—
But gold immixt with green.

Deeply astir in oozy bed,
The darkening mirror ripples and rocks:
And lo—a wan-pale, lovely head,
Hook tangled in its locks!

Cold from her haunt—a Naiad slim.
Shoulder and cheek gleamed ivory white;
Though now faint stars stood over him,
The hour hard on night.

Her green eyes gazed like one half-blind
In sudden radiance; her breast
Breathed the sweet air, while gently twined,
'Gainst the cold water pressed,

Her lean webbed hands. She floated there,
  Light as a scentless petalled flower,
Water-drops dewing from her hair
  In tinkling beadlike shower.

So circling sidelong, her tender throat
  Uttered a grieving, desolate wail;
Shrill o'er the dark pool lapsed its note,
  Piteous as nightingale.

Ceased Echo. And he?—a life's remorse
  Welled to a tongue unapt to charm,
But never a word broke harsh and hoarse
  To quiet her alarm.

With infinite stealth his twitching thumb
  Tugged softly at the tautened gut,
Bubble-light, fair, her lips now dumb,
  She moved, and struggled not;

But with set, wild, unearthly eyes
  Pale-gleaming, fixed as if in fear,
She couched in the water, with quickening sighs,
    And floated near.

In hollow heaven the stars were at play;
  Wan glow-worms greened the pool-side grass;
Dipped the wide-bellied boat. His prey
  Gazed on; nor breathed. Alas!—

Long sterile years had come and gone;
  Youth, like a distant dream, was sped;
Heart, hope, and eyes had hungered on. . . .
  He turned a shaking head,

And clumsily groped amid the gold,
  Sleek with night dews, of that tangling hair,
Till pricked his finger keen and cold
  The barb imbedded there.

Teeth clenched, he drew his knife—'Snip, snip,'—
  Groaned, and sate shivering back; and she,
Treading the water with birdlike dip,
  Shook her sweet shoulders free:

Drew backward, smiling, infatuate fair,
  His life's disasters in her eyes,
All longing and folly, grief, despair,
  Daydreams and mysteries.

She stooped her brow; laid low her cheek,
  And, steering on that silk-tressed craft,
Out from the listening, leaf-hung creek,
  Tossed up her chin, and laughed—

A mocking, icy, inhuman note.
  One instant flashed that crystal breast,
Leaned, and was gone. Dead-still the boat:
  And the deep dark at rest.

Flits moth to flower. A water-rat
  Noses the placid ripple. And lo!
Streams a lost meteor. Night is late,
  And daybreak zephyrs flow. . . .

And he—the cheated? Dusk till morn,
  Insensate, even of hope forsook,
He muttering squats, aloof, forlorn,
  Dangling a baitless hook.

THE WILLOW

LEANS now the fair willow, dreaming
Amid her locks of green.
In the driving snow she was parched and cold,
And in midnight hath been
Swept by blasts of the void night,
Lashed by the rains.
Now of that wintry dark and bleak
No memory remains.

In mute desire she sways softly;
Thrilling sap up-flows;
She praises God in her beauty and grace,
Whispers delight. And there flows
A delicate wind from the Southern seas,
Kissing her leaves. She sighs.
While the birds in her tresses make merry;
Burns the Sun in the skies.

TITMOUSE

IF you would happy company win,
Dangle a palm-nut from a tree,
Idly in green to sway and spin,
Its snow-pulped kernel for bait; and see,
A nimble titmouse enter in.

Out of earth's vast unknown of air,
Out of all summer, from wave to wave,
He'll perch, and prank his feathers fair,
Jangle a glass-clear wildering stave,
And take his commons there—

This tiny son of life; this spright,
By momentary Human sought,
Plume will his wing in the dappling light,
Clash timbrel shrill and gay—
And into time's enormous nought,
Sweet-fed, will flit away.

THE VEIL

I THINK and think; yet still I fail—
Why does this lady wear a veil?
Why thus elect to mask her face
Beneath that dainty web of lace?
The tip of a small nose I see,
And two red lips, set curiously
Like twin-born cherries on one stem,
And yet she has netted even them.
Her eyes, it's plain, survey with ease
Whatever to glance upon they please.
Yet, whether hazel, grey, or blue,
Or that even lovelier lilac hue,
I cannot guess: why—why deny
Such beauty to the passer-by?
Out of a bush a nightingale
May expound his song; beneath that veil
A happy mouth no doubt can make
English sound sweeter for its sake.
But then, why muffle in, like this,
What every blossomy wind would kiss?
Why in that little night disguise
A daybreak face, those starry eyes?

THE FAIRY IN WINTER

(For a drawing by Dorothy Puvis Lathrop)

THERE was a Fairy—flake of winter—
Who, when the snow came, whispering, Silence,
Sister crystal to crystal sighing,
Making of meadow argent palace,
  Night a star-sown solitude,
Cried 'neath her frozen eaves, 'I burn here!'

Wings diaphanous, beating bee-like,
Wand within fingers, locks enspangled,
Icicle foot, lip sharp as scarlet,
She lifted her eyes in her pitch-black hollow—
Green as stalks of weeds in water—
Breathed: stirred.

Rilled from her heart the ichor, coursing,
Flamed and awoke her slumbering magic.
Softlier than moth's her pinions trembled;
Out into blackness, light-like, she flittered,
Leaving her hollow cold, forsaken.

In air, o'er crystal, rang twangling night-wind.
Bare, rimed pine-woods murmured lament.

THE FLOWER

HORIZON to horizon, lies outspread
The tenting firmament of day and night;
Wherein are winds at play; and planets shed
Amid the stars their gentle gliding light.

The huge world's sun flames on the snow-capped
hills;
Cindrous his heat burns in the sandy plain;
With myriad spume-bows roaring ocean swills
The cold profuse abundance of the rain.

And man—a transient object in this vast,
Sighs o'er a universe transcending thought,
Afflicted by vague bodings of the past,
Driven toward a future, unforeseen, unsought.

Yet, see him, stooping low to naked weed
That meeks its blossom in his anxious eye,
Mark how he grieves, as if his heart did bleed,
And wheels his wondrous features to the sky;
As if, transfigured by so small a grace,
He sought Companion in earth's dwelling-place.

BEFORE DAWN

DIM-BERRIED is the mistletoe
With globes of sheenless grey,
The holly mid ten thousand thorns
Smoulders its fires away;
And in the manger Jesu sleeps
This Christmas Day.

Bull unto bull with hollow throat
Makes echo every hill,
Cold sheep in pastures thick with snow
The air with bleatings fill;
While of his mother's heart this Babe
Takes His sweet will.

All flowers and butterflies lie hid,
The blackbird and the thrush
Pipe but a little as they flit
Restless from bush to bush;
Even to the robin Gabriel hath
Cried softly, 'Hush!'

BEFORE DAWN

Now night is astir with burning stars
In darkness of the snow;
Burdened with frankincense and myrrh
And gold the Strangers go
Into a dusk where one dim lamp
Burns faintly, Lo!

No snowdrop yet its small head nods,
In winds of winter drear;
No lark at casement in the sky
Sings matins shrill and clear;
Yet in this frozen mirk the Dawn
Breathes, Spring is here!

THE SPECTRE

IN cloudy quiet of the day,
While thrush and robin perched mute on spray,
A spectre by the window sat,
Brooding thereat.

He marked the greenness of the Spring,
Daffodil blowing, bird a-wing—
Yet dark the house the years had made
Within that Shade.

Blinded the rooms wherein no foot falls.
Faded the portraits on the walls.
Reverberating, shakes the air
A river there.

Coursing in flood, its infinite roars;
From pit to pit its water pours;
And he, with countenance unmoved,
Hears cry:—'Beloved,

'Oh, ere the day be utterly spent,
Return, return, from banishment.
The night thick-gathers. Weep a prayer
For the true and fair.'

THE VOICE

'WE are not often alone, we two,'
Mused a secret voice in my ear,
As the dying hues of afternoon
Lapsed into evening drear.

A withered leaf, wafted on in the street,
Like a wayless spectre, sighed;
Aslant on the roof-tops a sickly moon
Did mutely abide.

Yet waste though the shallowing day might seem,
And fainter than hope its rose,
Strangely that speech in my thoughts welled on;
As water in-flows:

Like remembered words once heard in a room
Wherein death kept far-away tryst;
'Not often alone, we two; but thou,
How sorely missed!'

THE HOUR-GLASS

THOU who know'st all the sorrows of this earth—
I pray Thee, ponder, ere again Thou turn
Thine hour-glass over again, since one sole birth,
To poor clay-cold humanity, makes yearn
A heart at passion with life's endless coil.
Thou givest thyself too strait a room therein.
For so divine a tree too poor a soil.
For so great agony what small peace to win.
Cast from that Ark of Heaven which is Thy home
The raven of hell may wander without fear;
But sadly wings the dove o'er floods to roam,
Nought but one tender sprig his eyes to cheer.
Nay, Lord, I speak in parables. But see!
'Tis stricken Man in Men that pleads with Thee.

IN THE DOCK

PALLID, mis-shapen he stands. The world's
grimed thumb,
Now hooked securely in his matted hair,
Has haled him struggling from his poisonous slum
And flung him mute as fish close-netted there.
His bloodless hands entalon that iron rail.
He gloats in beastlike trance. His settling eyes
From staring face to face rove on—and quail.
Justice for carrion pants; and these the flies.
Voice after voice in smooth impartial drone
Erects horrific in his darkening brain
A timber framework, where agape, alone
Bright life will kiss good-bye the cheek of Cain.
Sudden like wolf he cries; and sweats to see
When howls man's soul, it howls inaudibly.

THE WRECK

STORM and unconscionable winds once cast
On grinding shingle, masking gap-toothed rock,
This ancient hulk. Rent hull, and broken mast,
She sprawls sand-mounded, of sea birds the mock.
Her sailors, drowned, forgotten, rot in mould,
Or hang in stagnant quiet of the deep;
The brave, the afraid into one silence sold;
Their end a memory fainter than of sleep.
She held good merchandise. She paced in pride
The uncharted paths men trace in ocean's foam.
Now laps the ripple in her broken side,
And zephyr in tamarisk softly whispers, Home.
The dreamer scans her in the sea-blue air,
And, sipping of contrast, finds the day more fair.

THE SUICIDE

DID these night-hung houses,
Of quiet, starlit stone,
Breathe not a whisper—'Stay,
Thou unhappy one;
Whither so secret away?'

Sighed not the unfriending wind,
Chill with nocturnal dew,
'Pause, pause, in thy haste,
O thou distraught! I too
Tryst with the Atlantic waste.'

Steep fell the drowsy street;
In slumber the world was blind:
Breathed not one midnight flower
Peace in thy broken mind?—
'Brief, yet sweet, is life's hour.'

Syllabled thy last tide—
By as dark moon stirred,
And doomed to forlorn unrest—
Not one compassionate word? . . .
'Cold is this breast.'

DRUGGED

INERT in his chair,
In a candle's guttering glow;
His bottle empty,
His fire sunk low;
With drug-sealed lids shut fast,
Unsated mouth ajar,
This darkened phantasm walks
Where nightmares are:

In a frenzy of life and light,
Crisscross—a menacing throng—
They gibe, they squeal at the stranger,
Jostling along,
Their faces cadaverous grey.
While on high from an attic stare
Horrors, in beauty apparelled,
Down the dark air.

A stream gurgles over its stones,
The chambers within are a-fire.
Stumble his shadowy feet
Through shine, through mire;
And the flames leap higher.

In vain yelps the wainscot mouse;
In vain beats the hour;
Vacant, his body must drowse
Until daybreak flower—

Staining these walls with its rose,
And the draughts of the morning shall stir
Cold on cold brow, cold hands.
And the wanderer
Back to flesh house must return.
Lone soul—in horror to see,
Than dream more meagre and awful,
Reality.

WHO'S THAT?

WHO'S that? Who's that? . . .
Oh, only a leaf on the stone;
And the sigh of the air in the fire.
Yet it seemed, as I sat,
Came company—not my own;
Stood there, with ardent gaze over dark, bowed shoulder thrown
Till the dwindling flames leaped higher,
And showed fantasy flown.

Yet though the cheat is clear—
From transient illusion grown;
In the vague of my mind those eyes
Still haunt me. One stands so near
I could take his hand, and be gone:—
No more in this house of dreams to sojourn aloof, alone:
Could sigh, with full heart, and arise,
And choke, 'Lead on.'

HOSPITAL

WELCOME! Enter! This is the Inn at the
Cross Roads,
Sign of the *Rising Sun*, of the *World's End*:
Ay, O Wanderer, footsore, weary, forsaken,
Knock, and we will open to thee—Friend.

Gloomy our stairs of stone, obscure the portal;
Burdened the air with a breath from the further
shore;
Yet in our courtyard plays an invisible fountain,
Ever flowers unfading nod at the door.

Ours is much company, and yet none is lonely;
Some with a smile may pay and some with a sigh;
So all be healed, restored, contented—it is no
matter—
So all be happy at heart to bid good-bye.

But know, our clocks are the world's; Night's wings
are leaden,
Pain languidly sports with the hours; have
courage, sir!
We wake but to bring thee slumber, our drowsy
syrups
Sleep beyond dreams on the weary will confer.

Ghosts may be ours; but gaze thou not too closely
If haply in chill of the dark thou rouse to see
One silent of foot, hooded, and hollow of visage,
    Pause, with secret eyes, to peer out at thee.

He is the Ancient Tapster of this Hostel,
To him at length even we all keys must resign;
And if he beckon, Stranger, thou too must follow—
    Love and all peace be thine.

A SIGN

HOW shall I know when the end of things is coming?
The dark swifts flitting, the drone-bees humming;
The fly on the window-pane bedazedly strumming;
Ice on the waterbrooks their clear chimes dumbing—
How shall I know that the end of things is coming?

The stars in their stations will shine glamorous in the black;
Emptiness, as ever, haunt the great Star Sack;
And Venus, proud and beautiful, go down to meet the day,
Pale in phosphorescence of the green sea spray—
How shall I know that the end of things is coming?

Head asleep on pillow; the peewits at their crying;
A strange face in dreams to my rapt phantasma sighing;
Silence beyond words of anguished passion;
Or stammering an answer in the tongue's cold fashion—
How shall I know that the end of things is coming?

A SIGN

Haply on strange roads I shall be, the moorland's
peace around me;
Or counting up a fortune to which Destiny hath
bound me;
Or—Vanity of Vanities—the honey of the Fair;
Or a greybeard, lost to memory, on the cobbles in
my chair—
How shall I know that the end of things is coming?

The drummers will be drumming; the fiddlers at
their thrumming;
Nuns at their beads; the mummers at their mum-
ming;
Heaven's solemn Seraph stoopt weary o'er his
summing;
The palsied fingers plucking, the way-worn feet
numbing—
And the end of things coming.

GOOD-BYE

THE last of last words spoken is, Good-bye—
The last dismantled flower in the weed-grown hedge,
The last thin rumour of a feeble bell far ringing,
The last blind rat to spurn the mildewed rye.

A hardening darkness glasses the haunted eye,
Shines into nothing the watcher's burnt-out candle,
Wreathes into scentless nothing the wasting incense,
Faints in the outer silence the hunting cry.

Love of its muted music breathes no sigh,
Thought in her ivory tower gropes in her spinning,
Toss on in vain the whispering trees of Eden,
Last of all last words spoken is, Good-bye.

THE MONOLOGUE

ALAS, O Lovely One,
Imprisoned here,
I tap; thou answerest not,
I doubt, and fear.
Yet transparent as glass these walls,
If thou lean near.

Last dusk, at those high bars
There came, scarce-heard,
Claws, fluttering feathers,
Of deluded bird—
With one shrill, scared, faint note
The silence stirred.

Rests in that corner,
In puff of dust, a straw—
Vision of harvest-fields
I never saw,
Of strange green streams and hills,
Forbidden by law.

These things I whisper,
For I see—in mind—
Thy caged cheek whiten
At the wail of wind,
That thin breast wasting; unto
Woe resigned.

Take comfort, listen!
Once we twain were free;
There was a Country—
Lost the memory . . .
Lay thy cold brow on hand,
And dream with me.

Awaits me torture,
I have smelt their rack;
From spectral groaning wheel
Have turned me back;
Thumbscrew and boot, and then—
The yawning sack.

Lean closer, then;
Lay palm on stony wall.
Let but thy ghost beneath
Thine eyelids call:
'Courage, my brother,' Nought
Can then appal.

Yet coward, coward am I,
And drink I must
When clanks the pannikin
With the longed-for crust;
Though heart within is sour
With disgust.

Long hours there are,
When mutely tapping—well,
Is it to Vacancy
I these tidings tell?
Knock these numb fingers against
An empty cell?

Nay, answer not.
Let still mere longing make
Thy presence sure to me,
While in doubt I shake:
Be but my Faith in thee,
For sanity's sake.

AWAKE!

WHY hath the rose faded and fallen, yet these
eyes have not seen?
Why hath the bird sung shrill in the tree—and
this mind deaf and cold?
Why have the rains of summer veiled her flowers
with their sheen
And this black heart untold?

Here is calm Autumn now, the woodlands quake,
And, where this splendour of death lies under the
tread,
The spectre of frost will stalk, and a silence make,
And snow's white shroud be spread.

O Self! O self! Wake from thy common sleep!
Fling off the destroyer's net. He hath blinded
and bound thee.
In nakedness sit; pierce thy stagnation, and
weep;
Or corrupt in thy grave—all Heaven around
thee.

FORGIVENESS

'O THY flamed cheek,
Those locks with weeping wet,
Eyes that, forlorn and meek,
On mine are set.

'Poor hands, poor feeble wings,
Folded, a-droop, O sad!
See, 'tis my heart that sings
To make thee glad.

'My mouth breathes love, thou dear.
All that I am and know
Is thine. My breast—draw near:
Be grieved not so!'

THE MOTH

ISLED in the midnight air,
Musked with the dark's faint bloom,
Out into glooming and secret haunts
The flame cries, 'Come!'

Lovely in dye and fan,
A-tremble in shimmering grace,
A moth from her winter swoon
Uplifts her face:

Stares from her glamorous eyes;
Wafts her on plumes like mist;
In ecstasy swirls and sways
To her strange tryst.

NOT THAT WAY

No, no. Guard thee. Get thee gone.
Not that way.
See; the louring clouds glide on,
Skirting West to South; and see,
The green light under that sycamore tree—
Not that way.

There the leaden trumpets blow,
Solemn and slow.
There the everlasting walls
Frown above the waterfalls
Silver and cold;
Timelessly old:
Not that way.

Not toward Death, who, stranger, fairer,
Than any siren turns his head—
Than sea-couched siren, arched with rainbows,
Where knell the waves of her ocean bed.

Alas, that beauty hangs her flowers
For lure of his demoniac powers:
Alas, that from these eyes should dart
Such piercing summons to thy heart;
That mine in frenzy of longing beats,
Still lusting for these gross deceits.
Not that way!

CRAZED

I KNOW a pool where nightshade preens
Her poisonous fruitage in the moon;
Where the frail aspen her shadow leans
In midnight cold a-swoon.

I know a meadow flat with gold—
A million million burning flowers
In noon-sun's thirst their buds unfold
Beneath his blazing showers.

I saw a crazèd face, did I,
Stare from the lattice of a mill,
While the lank sails clacked idly by
High on the windy hill.

FOG

STAGNANT this wintry gloom. Afar
The farm-cock bugles his 'Qui vive?'
The towering elms are lost in mist;
Birds in the thorn-trees huddle a-whist;
The mill-race waters grieve.
Our shrouded day
Dwindles away
To final black of eve.

Beyond these shades in space of air
Ride exterrestrial beings by?
Their colours burning rich and fair,
Where noon's sunned valleys lie?
With inaudible music are they sweet—
Bell, hoof, soft lapsing cry?

Turn marvellous faces, each to each?—
Lips innocent of sigh,
Or groan or fear, sorrow and grief,
Clear brow and falcon eye;
Bare foot, bare shoulder in the heat,
And hair like flax? Do their horses beat
Their way through wildernesses infinite
Of starry-crested trees, blue sward,

And gold-chasm'd mountain, steeply shored
O'er lakes of sapphire dye?

Mingled with lisping speech, faint laughter,
Echoes the Phoenix' scream of joyance
Mounting on high?—
Light-bathed vistas and divine sweet mirth,
Beyond dream of spirits penned to earth,
Condemned to pine and die? . . .

Hath serving Nature, bidden of the gods,
Thick-screened Man's narrow sky,
And hung these Stygian veils of fog
To hide his dingied sty?—
The gods who yet, at mortal birth,
Bequeathed him Fantasy?

SOTTO VOCE

(To Edward Thomas)

THE haze of noon wanned silver-grey
The soundless mansion of the sun;
The air made visible in his ray,
Like molten glass from furnace run,
Quivered o'er heat-baked turf and stone
And the flower of the gorse burned on—
Burned softly as gold of a child's fair hair
Along each spiky spray, and shed
Almond-like incense in the air
Whereon our senses fed.

At foot—a few sparse harebells: blue
And still as were the friend's dark eyes
That dwelt on mine, transfixèd through
With sudden ecstatic surmise.

'Hst!' he cried softly, smiling, and lo,
Stealing amidst that maze gold-green,
I heard a whispering music flow
From guileful throat of bird, unseen:—

SOTTO VOCE

So delicate the straining ear
Scarce carried its faint syllabling
Into a heart caught-up to hear
That inmost pondering
Of bird-like self with self. We stood,
In happy trance-like solitude,
Hearkening a lullay grieved and sweet—
As when on isle uncharted beat
'Gainst coral at the palm-tree's root,
With brine-clear, snow-white foam afloat,
The wailing, not of water or wind—
A husht, far, wild, divine lament,
When Prospero his wizardry bent
Winged Ariel to bind. . . .

Then silence, and o'er-flooding noon.
I raised my head; smiled too. And he—
Moved his great hand, the magic gone—
Gently amused to see
My ignorant wonderment. He sighed.
'It was a nightingale,' he said,
'That *sotto voce* cons the song
He'll sing when dark is spread;
And Night's vague hours are sweet and long.
And we are laid abed.'

THE IMAGINATION'S PRIDE

BE not too wildly amorous of the far,
Nor lure thy fantasy to its utmost scope.
Read by a taper when the needling star
Burns red with menace in heaven's midnight cope.
Friendly thy body: guard its solitude.
Sure shelter is thy heart. It once had rest
Where founts miraculous thy lips endewed,
Yet nought loomed further than thy mother's breast.

O brave adventure! Ay, at danger slake
Thy thirst, lest life in thee should, sickening, quail;
But not toward nightmare goad a mind awake,
Nor to forbidden horizons bend thy sail—
Seductive outskirts whence in trance prolonged
Thy gaze, at stretch of what is sane-secure,
Dreams out on steeps by shapes demoniac thronged
And vales wherein alone the dead endure.

Nectarous those flowers, yet with venom sweet.
Thick-juiced with poison hang those fruits that shine
Where sick phantasmal moonbeams brood and beat,
And dark imaginations ripe the vine.
Bethink thee: every enticing league thou wend
Beyond the mark where life its bound hath set
Will lead thee at length where human pathways end
And the dark enemy spreads his maddening net.

Comfort thee, comfort thee. Thy Father knows
How wild man's ardent spirit, fainting, yearns
For mortal glimpse of death's immortal rose,
The garden where the invisible blossom burns.
Humble thy trembling knees; confess thy pride;
Be weary. O, whithersoever thy vaunting rove,
His deepest wisdom harbours in thy side,
In thine own bosom hides His utmost love.

THE WANDERERS

WITHIN my mind two spirits strayed
From out their still and purer air,
And there a moment's sojourn made;
As lovers will in woodlands bare.
Nought heeded they where now they stood,
Since theirs its alien solitude
Beyond imagination fair.

The light an earthly candle gives
When it is quenched leaves only dark;
Theirs yet in clear remembrance lives
And, still within, I whispered, 'Hark;'
As one who faintly on high has heard
The call note of a hidden bird
Even sweeter than the lark.

Yet 'twas their silence breathed only this—
'I love you.' As if flowers might say,
'Such is our natural fragrantness;'
Or dewdrop at the break of day
Cry 'Thus I beam.' Each turned a head,
And each its own clear radiance shed
With joy and peace at play.

So in a gloomy London street
Princes from Eastern realms might pause
In secret converse, then retreat.
Yet without haste passed these from sight;
As if a human mind were not
Wholly a dark and dismal spot—
At least in their own light.

THE CORNER STONE

STERILE these stones
By time in ruin laid.
Yet many a creeping thing
Its haven has made
In these least crannies, were falls
Dark's dew, and noonday shade.

The claw of the tender bird
Finds lodgment here;
Dye-winged butterflies poise;
Emmet and beetle steer
Their busy course; the bee
Drones, laden, near.

Their myriad-mirrored eyes
Great day reflect.
By their exquisite farings
Is this granite specked;
Is trodden to infinite dust;
By gnawing lichens decked.

Toward what eventual dream
Sleeps its cold on,
When into ultimate dark
These lives shall be gone,
And even of man not a shadow remain
Of all he has done?

THE SPIRIT OF AIR

CORAL and clear emerald,
And amber from the sea,
Lilac-coloured amethyst,
Chalcedony;
The lovely Spirit of Air
Floats on a cloud and doth ride,
Clad in the beauties of earth
Like a bride.

So doth she haunt me; and words
Tell but a tithe of the tale.
Sings all the sweetness of Spring
Even in the nightingale?
Nay, but with echoes she cries
Of the valley of love;
Dews on the thorns at her feet,
And darkness above.

THE UNFINISHED DREAM

RARE-SWEET the air in that unimagined
country—
My spirit had wandered far
From its weary body close-enwrapt in slumber
Where its home and earth-friends are;

A milk-like air—and of light all abundance;
And there a river clear
Painting the scene like a picture on its bosom,
Green foliage drifting near.

No sign of life I saw, as I pressed onward,
Fish, nor beast, nor bird,
Till I came to a hill clothed in flowers to its summit,
Then shrill small voices I heard.

And I saw from concealment a company of elf-folk
With faces strangely fair,
Talking their unearthly scattered talk together,
A bind of green-grasses in their hair,

Marvellously gentle, feater far than children,
In gesture, mien and speech,
Hastening onward in translucent shafts of sunshine,
And gossiping each with each.

Straw-light their locks, on neck and shoulder falling,
Faint of almond the silks they wore,
Spun not of worm, but as if inwoven of moonbeams
And foam on rock-bound shore;

Like lank-legged grasshoppers in June-tide meadows,
Amalillios of the day,
Hungrily gazed upon by me—a stranger,
In unknown regions astray.

Yet, happy beyond words, I marked their sunlit faces,
Stealing soft enchantment from their eyes,
Tears in my own confusing their small image,
Harkening their bead-like cries.

They passed me, unseeing, a waft of flocking linnets;
  Sadly I fared on my way;
And came in my dream to a dreamlike habitation,
  Close-shut, festooned and grey.

Pausing, I gazed at the porch dust-still, vine-
    wreathèd,
  Worn the stone steps thereto,
Mute hung its bell, whence a stony head looked
    downward,
  Grey 'gainst the sky's pale-blue—

  Strange to me: strange. . . .

MUSIC

O RESTLESS fingers—not that music make!
Bidding old griefs from out the past awake,
And pine for memory's sake.

Those strings thou callest from quiet mute to yearn,
Of other hearts did hapless secrets learn,
And thy strange skill will turn

To uses that thy bosom dreams not of:
Ay, summon from their dark and dreadful grove
The chaunting, pale-cheeked votaries of love.

Stay now, and hearken! From that far-away
Cymbal on cymbal beats, the fierce horns bray,
Stars in their sapphire fade, 'tis break of day.

Green are those meads, foam-white the billow's
crest,
And Night, withdrawing in the cavernous West,
Flings back her shadow on the salt sea's breast.

Snake-haired, snow-shouldered, pure as flame and
dew,
Her strange gaze burning slumbrous eyelids
through,
Rises the Goddess from the wave's dark blue.

TIDINGS

LISTEN, I who love thee well
Have travelled far, and secrets tell;
Cold the moon that gleams thine eyes,
Yet beneath her further skies
Rests for thee, a paradise.

I have plucked a flower in proof,
Frail, in earthly light forsooth:
See, invisible it lies
In this palm: now veil thine eyes:
Quaff its fragrancies.

Would indeed my throat had skill
To breathe thee music, faint and still—
Music learned in dreaming deep
In those lands, from Echo's lip . . .
'Twould lull thy soul to sleep.

THE SON OF MELANCHOLY

UNTO blest Melancholy's house one happy day
I took my way:
Into a chamber was shown, whence could be seen
Her flowerless garden, dyed with sunlit green
Of myrtle, box, and bay.

Cool were its walls, shade-mottled, green and gold,
In heavy fold
Hung antique tapestries, from whose fruit and flower
Light had the bright hues stolen, hour by hour,
And time worn thin and old.

Silence, as of a virginal laid aside,
Did there abide.
But not for voice or music was I fain,
Only to see a long-loved face again—
For her sole company sighed.

And while I waited, giving memory praise,
My musing gaze
Lit on the one sole picture in the room,
Which hung, as if in hiding, in the gloom
From evening's stealing rays.

Framed in fast-fading gilt, a child gazed there,
Lovely and fair;
A face whose happiness was like sunlight spent
On some poor desolate soul in banishment,
Mutely his grief to share.

Long, long I stood in trance of that glad face,
Striving to trace
The semblance that, disquieting, it bore
To one whom memory could not restore,
Nor fix in time and space.

Sunk deep in brooding thus, a voice I heard
Whisper its word:
I turned—and, stooping in the threshold, stood
She—the dark mistress of my solitude,
Who smiled, nor stirred.

Her ghost gazed darkly from her pondering eyes
Charged with surmise;
Challenging mine, between mockery and fear,
She breathed her greeting, '*Thou*, my only dear!
Wherefore such heavy sighs?'

'But this?' One instant lids her scrutiny veiled;
Her wan cheek paled.
'This child?' I asked. 'Its picture brings to mind
Remembrance faint and far, past thought to find,
And yet by time unstaled.'

Smiling, aloof, she turned her narrow head,
'Make thou my face thy glass,' she cried and said.
'What would'st thou see therein—thine own, or
mine?
O foolish one, what wonder thou did'st pine?

Long thou hast loved me; yet hast absent been.
See now: Dark night hath pressed an entrance in.
Jealous! thou dear? Nay, come; by taper's beam
Share thou this pictured Joy with me, though
nought but a dream.'

THE QUIET ENEMY

HEARKEN—now the hermit bee
Drones a quiet thren dy;
Greening on the stagnant pool
The criss-cross light slants silken-cool;
In the venomed yew tree wings
Preen and flit. The linnet sings.

Gradually the brave sun
Drops to a day's journey done;
In the marshy flats abide
Mists to muffle midnight-tide.
Puffed within the belfry tower
Hungry owls drowse out their hour. . . .

Walk in beauty. Vaunt thy rose.
Flaunt thy transient loveliness.
Pace for pace with thee there goes
A shape that hath not come to bless.

I thine enemy? . . . Nay, nay.
I can only watch and wait
Patient treacherous time away,
Hold ajar the wicket gate.

THE FAMILIAR

'ARE you far away?'
'Yea, I am far—far;
Where the green wave shelves to the sand,
And the rainbows are;
And an ageless sun beats fierce
From an empty sky:
There, O thou Shadow forlorn,
Is the wraith of thee, I.'

'Are you happy, most Lone?'
'Happy, forsooth!
Who am eyes of the air; voice of the foam;
Ah, happy in truth.
My hair is astream, this cheek
Glistens like silver, and see,
As the gold to the dross, the ghost in the mirk,
I am calling to thee.'

'Nay, I am bound.
And your cry faints out in my mind.
Peace not on earth have I found,
Yet to earth am resigned.
Cease thy shrill mockery, Voice,
Nor answer again.'
'O Master, thick cloud shuts thee out
And cold tempests of rain.'

MAERCHEN

SOUNDLESS the moth-flit, crisp the death-watch
tick;
Crazed in her shaken arbour bird did sing;
Slow wreathed the grease adown from soot-clogged
wick:
The Cat looked long and softly at the King.

Mouse frisked and scampered, leapt, gnawed,
squeaked;
Small at the window looped cowled bat a-wing;
The dim-lit rafters with the night-mist reeked:
The Cat looked long and softly at the King.

O wondrous robe enstarred, in night dyed deep:
O air scarce-stirred with the Court's far junketing:
O stagnant Royalty—A-swoon? Asleep?
The Cat looked long and softly at the King.

GOLD

SIGHED the wind to the wheat:—
'The Queen who is slumbering there,
Once bewildered the rose;
Scorned, "Thou un-fair!"
Once, from that bird-whirring court,
Ascended the ruinous stair.
Aloft, on that weed-hung turret, suns
Smote on her hair—
Of a gold by Archiac sought,
Of a gold sea-hid,
Of a gold that from core of quartz
No flame shall bid
Pour into light of the air
For God's Jews to see.'

Mocked the wheat to the wind—
'Kiss me! Kiss me!'

MIRAGE

. . . And burned the topless towers of Ilium

STRANGE fabled face! From sterile shore to shore
O'er plunging seas, thick-sprent with glistening brine,
The voyagers of the World with sail and heavy oar
Have sought thy shrine.
Beauty inexorable hath lured them on:
Remote unnamèd stars enclustering gleam—
Burn in thy flowered locks, though creeping day-break wan
Prove thee but dream.

Noonday to night the enigma of thine eyes
Frets with desire their travel-wearied brain,
Till in the vast of dark the ice-cold moon arise
And pour them peace again;
And with malign mirage uprears an isle
Of fountain and palm, and courts of jasmine and rose,
Whence far decoy of siren throats their souls beguile,
And maddening fragrance flows.

Lo, in the milken light, in tissue of gold
Thine apparition gathers in the air—
Nay, but the seas are deep, and the round world old,
And thou art named, Despair.

FLOTSAM

SCREAMED the far sea-mew. On the mirroring sands
Bell-shrill the oyster-catchers. Burned the sky.
Couching my cheeks upon my sun-scorched hands,
Down from bare rock I gazed. The sea swung by.

Dazzling dark blue and verdurous, quiet with snow,
Empty with loveliness, with music a-roar,
Her billowing summits heaving noon-aglow—
Crashed the Atlantic on the cliff-ringed shore,

Drowsed by the tumult of that moving deep,
Sense into outer silence fainted, fled;
And rising softly, from the fields of sleep,
Stole to my eyes a lover from the dead;

Crying an incantation—learned, Where? When? . .
White swirled the foam, a fount, a blinding gleam
Of ice-cold breast, cruel eyes, wild mouth—and then
A still dirge echoing on from dream to dream.

MOURN'ST THOU NOW?

LONG ago from radiant palace,
Dream-bemused, in flood of moon,
Stole the princess Seraphita
Into forest gloom.

Wail of hemlock; cold the dewdrops;
Danced the Dryads in the chace;
Heavy hung ambrosial fragrance;
Moonbeams blanched her ravished face.

Frail and clear the notes delusive;
Mocking phantoms in a rout
Thridded the night-cloistered thickets,
Wove their sorceries in and out. . . .

Mourn'st thou now? Or do thine eyelids
Frame a vision dark, divine,
O'er this imp of star and wild-flower—
Of a god once thine?

THE GALLIASS

'TELL me, tell me,
Unknown stranger,
When shall I sight me
That tall ship
On whose flower-wreathed counter is gilded,
Sleep?'

'Landsman, landsman,
Lynx nor kestrel
Ne'er shall descry from
Ocean steep
That midnight-stealing, high-pooped galliass, *Sleep.*'

'Promise me, Stranger,
Though I mark not
When cold night-tide's
Shadows creep,
Thou wilt keep unwavering watch for *Sleep.*'

'Myriad the lights are,
Wayworn landsman,
Rocking the dark through
On the deep:
She alone burns none to prove her *Sleep.*'

THE DECOY

'TELL us, O pilgrim, what strange She
Lures and decoys your wanderings on?
Cheek, eye, brow, lip, you scan each face,
Smile, ponder—and are gone.

'Are we not flesh and blood? Mark well,
We touch you with our hands. We speak
A tongue that may earth's secrets tell:
Why further will you seek?'

'Far have I come, and far must fare.
Noon and night and morning-prime,
I search the long road, bleak and bare,
That fades away in Time.

'On the world's brink its wild weeds shake,
And there my own dust, dark with dew,
Burns with a rose that, sleep or wake,
Beacons me—"Follow true!"'

'Her name, crazed soul? And her degree?
What peace, prize, profit in her breast?'
'A thousand cheating names hath she;
And none fore-tokens rest.'

SUNK LYONESSE

IN sea-cold Lyonesse,
When the Sabbath eve shafts down
On the roofs, walls, belfries
Of the foundered town,
The Nereids pluck their lyres
Where the green translucency beats,
And with motionless eyes at gaze
Make minstrelsy in the streets.

And the ocean water stirs
In salt-worn casemate and porch.
Plies the blunt-snouted fish
With fire in his skull for torch.
And the ringing wires resound;
And the unearthly lovely weep,
In lament of the music they make
In the sullen courts of sleep:

Whose marble flowers bloom for aye:
And—lapped by the moon-guiled tide—
Mock their carver with heart of stone,
Caged in his stone-ribbed side.

THE CATECHISM

'HAST thou then nought wiser to bring
Than worn-out songs of moon and rose?'
'Cracked my voice and broken my wing,
God knows.'

'Tell'st thou no truth of the life that *is;*
Seek'st thou from heaven no pitying sign?'
'Ask thine own heart these mysteries,
Not mine.'

'Where then the faith thou hast brought to seed?
Where the sure hope thy soul would feign?'
'Never ebbed sweetness—even out of a weed—
In vain.'

'Fool. The night comes. . . . 'Tis late. Arise:
Cold lap the waters of Jordan stream.'
'Deep be their flood and tranquil thine eyes
With a dream.'

FUTILITY

SINK, thou strange heart, unto thy rest.
Pine now no more, to pine in vain.
Doth not the moon on heaven's breast
Call the floods home again?

Doth not the summer faint at last?
Do not her restless rivers flow
When that her transient day is past
To hide them in ice and snow?

All this—thy world—an end shall make;
Planet to sun return again;
The universe, to sleep from wake,
In a last peace remain.

Alas, the futility of care
That, spinning thought to thought, doth weave
An idle argument on the air
We love not, nor believe.

BITTER WATERS

IN a dense wood, a drear wood,
Dark water is flowing;
Deep, deep, beyond sounding,
A flood ever flowing.

There harbours no wild bird,
No wanderer strays there;
Wreathed in mist, sheds pale Ishtar
Her sorrowful rays there.

Take thy net; cast thy line;
Manna sweet be thy baiting;
Time's desolate ages
Shall still find thee waiting

For quick fish to rise there,
Or butterfly wooing,
Or flower's honeyed beauty,
Or wood-pigeon cooing.

Inland wellsprings are sweet;
But to lips, parched and dry,
Salt, salt is the savour
Of these; faint their sigh.

Bitter Babylon's waters.
  Zion, distant and fair.
We hanged up our harps
  On the trees that are there.

WHO?

1ST STRANGER. WHO walks with us on the hills?
2ND STRANGER. I cannot see for the mist.
3RD STRANGER. Running water I hear,
Keeping lugubrious tryst
With its cresses and grasses and weeds,
In the white obscure light from the sky.
2ND STRANGER. *Who walks with us on the hills?*
WILD BIRD. Ay ! . . . Aye ! . . . *Ay !* . . .

A RIDDLE

THE mild noon air of Spring again
Lapped shimmering in that sea-lulled lane.
Hazel was budding; wan as snow
The leafless blackthorn was a-blow.

A chaffinch clankt, a robin woke
An eerie stave in the leafless oak.
Green mocked at green; lichen and moss
The rain-worn slate did softly emboss.

From out her winter lair, at sigh
Of the warm South wind, a butterfly
Stepped, quaffed her honey; on painted fan
Her labyrinthine flight began.

Wondrously solemn, golden and fair,
The high sun's rays beat everywhere;
Yea, touched my cheek and mouth, as if,
Equal with stone, to me 'twould give
Its light and life.

A RIDDLE

O restless thought
Contented not. With 'Why' distraught.
Whom asked you then your riddle small?—
'If hither came no man at all

'Through this grey-green, sea-haunted lane,
Would it mere blackened nought remain?
Strives it this beauty and life to express
Only in human consciousness?'

Oh, rather, idly breaks he in
To an Eden innocent of sin;
And, prouder than to be afraid,
Forgets his Maker in the made.

THE OWL

WHAT if to edge of dream,
When the spirit is come,
Shriek the hunting owl,
And summon it home—
To the fear-stirred heart
And the ancient dread
Of man, when cold root or stone
Pillowed roofless head?

Clangs not at last the hour
When roof shelters not;
And the ears are deaf,
And all fears forgot:
Since the spirit too far has fared
For summoning scream
Of any strange fowl on earth
To shatter its dream?

THE LAST COACHLOAD

(To Colin)

CRASHED through the woods that lumbering
Coach. The dust
Of flinted roads bepowdering felloe and hood.
Its gay paint cracked, its axles red with rust,
It lunged, lurched, toppled through a solitude

Of whispering boughs, and feathery, nid-nod grass.
Plodded the fetlocked horses. Glum and mum,
Its ancient Coachman recked not where he was,
Nor into what strange haunt his wheels were come.

Crumbling the leather of his dangling reins;
Worn to a cow's tuft his stumped, idle whip;
Sharp eyes of beast and bird in the trees' green
lanes
Gleamed out like stars above a derelict ship.

'Old Father Time—Time—Time!' jeered twittering throat.
A squirrel capered on the leader's rump,
Slithered a weasel, peered a thieflike stoat,
In sandy warren beat on the coney's thump.

Mute as a mammet in his saddle sate
The hunched Postilion, clad in magpie trim;
Buzzed the bright flies around his hairless pate;
Yaffle and jay squawked mockery at him.

Yet marvellous peace and amity breathed there.
Tranquil the labyrinths of this sundown wood.
Musking its chaces, bloomed the brier-rose fair;
Spellbound as if in trance the pine-trees stood.

Through moss, and pebbled rut, the wheels rasped on;
That Ancient drowsing on his box. And still
The bracken track with glazing sunbeams shone;
Laboured the horses, straining at the hill. . . .

But now—a verdurous height with eve-shade sweet;
Far, far to West the Delectable Mountains glowed.
Above, Night's canopy; at the horses' feet
A sea-like honied waste of flowers flowed.

There fell a pause of utter quiet. And—
Out from one murky window glanced an eye,
Stole from the other a lean, groping hand,
The padded door swung open with a sigh.

And—*Exeunt Omnes!* None to ask the fare—
A myriad human Odds in a last release
Leap out incontinent, snuff the incensed air;
A myriad parched-up voices whisper, 'Peace.'

On, on, and on—a stream, a flood, they flow.
O wondrous vale of jocund buds and bells!
Like vanishing smoke the rainbow legions
glow,
Yet still the enravished concourse sweeps and
swells.

All journeying done. Rest now from lash and
spur—
Laughing and weeping, shoulder and elbow—
'twould seem
That Coach capacious all Infinity were,
And these the fabulous figments of a dream.

Mad for escape; frenzied each breathless mote,
Lest rouse the Old Enemy from his death-still
swoon,
Lest crack that whip again—they fly, they float,
Scamper, breathe—'Paradise!' abscond, are
gone. . . .

AN EPITAPH

LAST, Stone, a little yet;
And then this dust forget.
But thou, fair Rose, bloom on.
For she who is gone
Was lovely too; nor would she grieve to be
Sharing in solitude her dreams with thee.

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